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Students' perceptions and attitudes towards rubric assessment of creativity

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*“Because you’ve spent so many hours of real life on this project, it’s like your child...
and somebody just called your baby ugly.”*

Introduction & Objective of Study. The creativity of a product is a separate design construct, though often subjective and interlaced with other constructs such as functionality and aesthetic appeal (Amabile, 1982; Christiaans, 2002). Rubrics can be used to objectively assess creativity, which is often subjectively assessed by assuming that most appropriate observers in a given domain will reach consensus on what constitutes creativity (Kidd & Workman, 1999; Amabile, 1982). This study explored the impact of analytical rubrics on students' perceptions and attitudes towards self- and peer-assessment of creative projects.

Methodology. An IRB approved focus group was used to gather in-depth qualitative data from female undergraduate students (n=6) from a large southeastern university. All participants were upperclassmen, had taken a textile design studio class, and the majority (n=5) were fashion and textile design majors. Retrospective reflective questions were asked in order to collect in-depth data on students' perceptions and attitudes of using analytical rubrics to assess creative projects in design studios (Allen & Nimon, 2007).

Results: Self-Assessing. Students' discussion of rubrics suggests that they have both a negative and positive impact on students' perceptions and behaviors of self-assessment, depending upon assessment context and students' perceptions of the rubric. Assessment contexts discussed were in-class critiques of finished projects, in-class critiques by the instructor of in-process projects, and informal assessments by classmates in and out of studio. Students described how they were more likely to use a rubric as a check-list at the conclusion of a project to ensure a good grade, rather than as a creativity assessment tool as intended. One student pointed out the dichotomy between making the subjective (creativity) objective (allotting points per criteria); “How do you quantify the creative process?” Many students felt the rubric criteria were too prescriptive for the creative design process. They therefore had a negative perception of the rubric and did not use it for self-assessment. How students approached creative research prompted the most discussion, as it affected how students found and used design inspirations. Several students discussed how the *Research* criteria on rubrics was restricted their inspiration process, which they felt made projects less creative. One student discussed how she would design for the grade and change her creative design to fit the criteria on the rubric, instead of staying true to her original inspiration. She felt that having to modify her original inspiration to fit the *Research* criteria of the rubric had a negative impact on the overall creativity of her projects.

Students perceived the rubrics' criteria as following a creative design process, which was perceived positively for self-assessment during their first years of college but negatively once

students had defined their own design processes. Several students appreciated the ability of rubrics to communicate foundational knowledge for producing and assessing creative projects. One student explained how rubrics positively impacted her perception of self-assessment by creating a foundation on which she could base future self-assessments of product creativity.

Results: Peer-Assessing. All students agreed that rubrics had a positive impact on peer-assessing creative projects, and on their ability to give and receive constructive criticism. Using the rubrics as a guide, students are able to learn what criteria and terminology they should use when assessing peers' creative work. Rubrics enabled more constructive criticism and specific feedback on creative projects, instead of general comments such as, "I like your colors." One student explained the rubrics' positive impact on her ability to give peer-assessment. Instead of assessing class-mates' work as, "Oh, that's pretty," she was able to use the rubrics to learn what defines a creative textile design, patterns, or presentation. Results also suggest that an analytical rubric's objectivity positively impacts students' attitudes towards receiving peer-assessment. Students are aware that feedback is not personal, but is instead guided by the rubric.

Students discussed how they find experts within their peer group to assess and provide feedback on creative projects, both when working in and out of class. Selected appropriate observers, or 'expert' peer-assessors, are chosen based on the selectee's relationship with the assessor, generally guided by trust and a sense of friendship. For example, someone whom students trust will, "call my baby ugly."

Conclusion. Results support the concept that students in design studios find their own appropriate observers to assess their creative work from within their peer-group of classmates (Amabile, 1982; Hasirci & Demirkan, 2002). Overall, students had negative perceptions and attitudes towards using analytical rubrics to assess their own creative projects. Students had positive perceptions and attitudes towards rubrics when giving or receiving peer-assessments.

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